VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Drainage and Safety Improvement Project on Route 133

July 19, 2017

California Department of Transportation

District 12, Orange County, Rte 133
PM 3.1/4.3
Project ID #1216000133, EA 0Q3600

Prepared by: _____ **Date:** 07/21/17

Vathana Chy, RLA
Project Landscape Architect
License # 5897

Approved by: _____ **Date:** 7/21/17

Eric Dickson
License # 3814
Caltrans District Landscape Architect
Landscape Architecture Branch
District 12

Statement of Compliance: Produced in compliance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements, as appropriate, to meet the level of analysis and documentation that has been determined necessary for this project.

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
Drainage and Safety Improvement Project at Route 133

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT METHOD

The purpose of this visual impact assessment (VIA) is to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed project and propose measures to lessen any detrimental impacts that are identified. Visual impacts are demonstrated by identifying visual resources in the project area, measuring the amount of change that would occur as a result of the project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes. This visual impact assessment follows the guidance outlined in the publication *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in March 1981.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

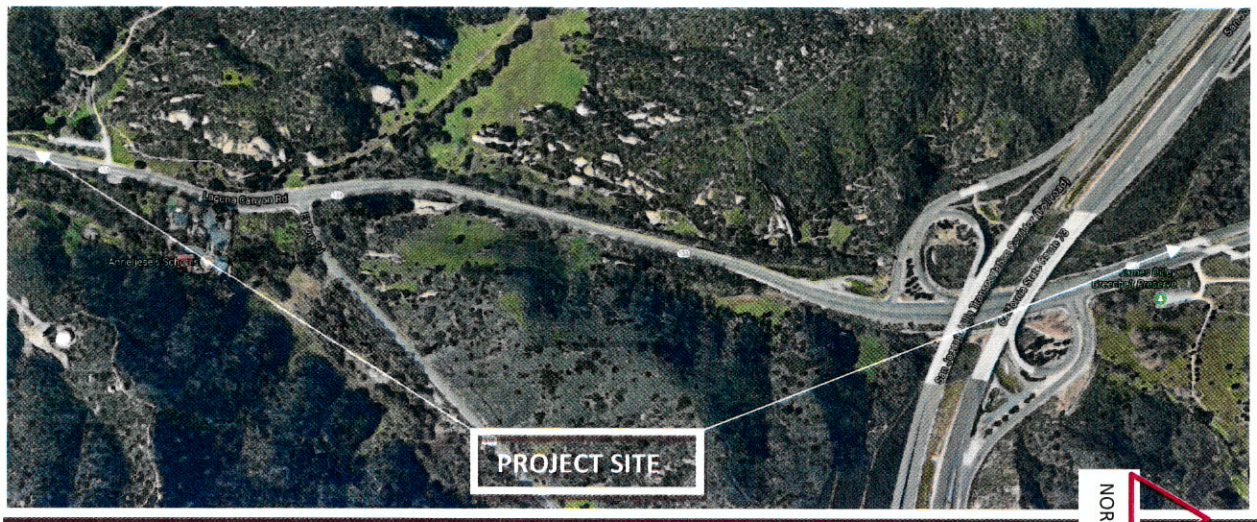
This improvement project is on Route 133, Laguna Canyon Road, from 0.3 mile south of El Toro Road (PM 3.1) to 0.2 mile north of Route 73/133 Interchange (PM R4.3). The proposed project is located in the City of Laguna Beach and in South Orange County.

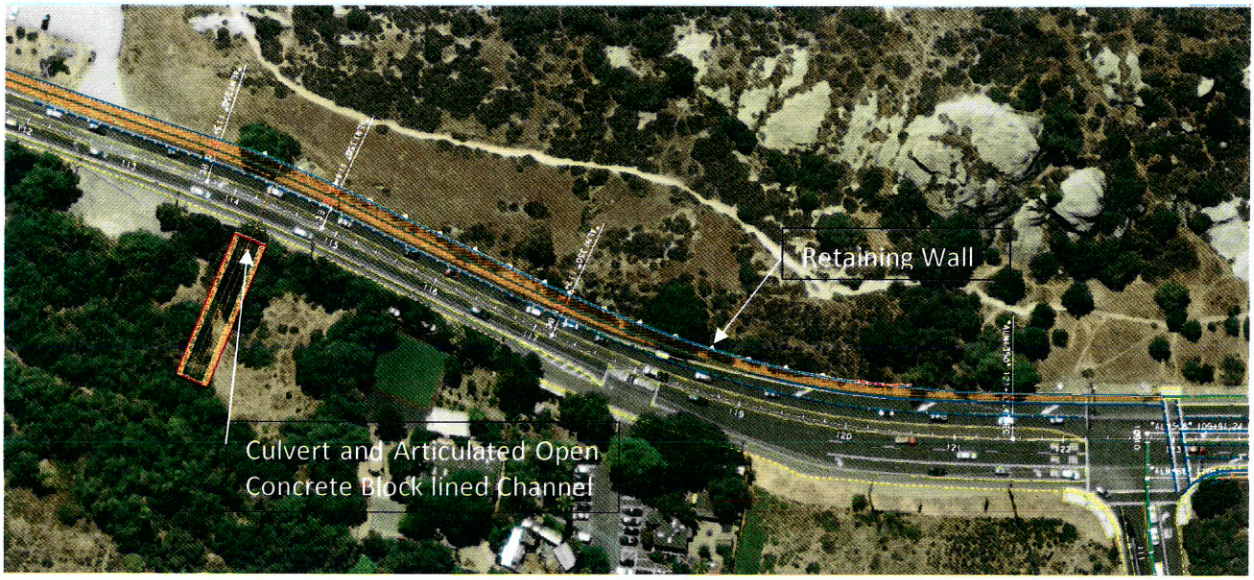
The scope of the projects are drainage improvement and safety improvement. The project proposes to provide two lanes in the northbound (NB) direction between El Toro Road and Rte-133/Rte-73 interchange, extend the second travel lane by 900 feet in the southbound (SB) direction, and reassign the exclusive right-turn lane to an optional right/left turn lane on westbound El Toro Road. Also, the project will improve safety by providing standard shoulders and Class III bike lanes. The project will reduce the number of fixed objects by undergrounding existing overhead utility poles along northbound (NB) and southbound (SB) of Route 133.

A retaining wall with architectural treatment will be constructed on the southbound (relatively at station 113+80 to 120+00) and northbound (station 151+50 to 154+50) side of Route 133 to provide two 12 foot travel lanes and 10 foot shoulder. Mature oak trees located on the slope near and above the proposed retaining wall, would be preserved by designing the retaining wall around the tree. Removal of some native vegetation and oak trees will be removed to accommodate the widening. Various drainage improvement are implemented throughout the project to relieve flooding issues, and a proposed buttress dam to increase capacity is located at the Laguna Canyon Road southbound loop on-ramp. A drainage system with an articulated concrete block lined channel will be added (station 114+30).

These project improvements are expected to reduce collision rates at this location.

VICINITY MAP





Proposed project improvements south and north of El Toro Road


Proposed project improvements north of El Toro Road

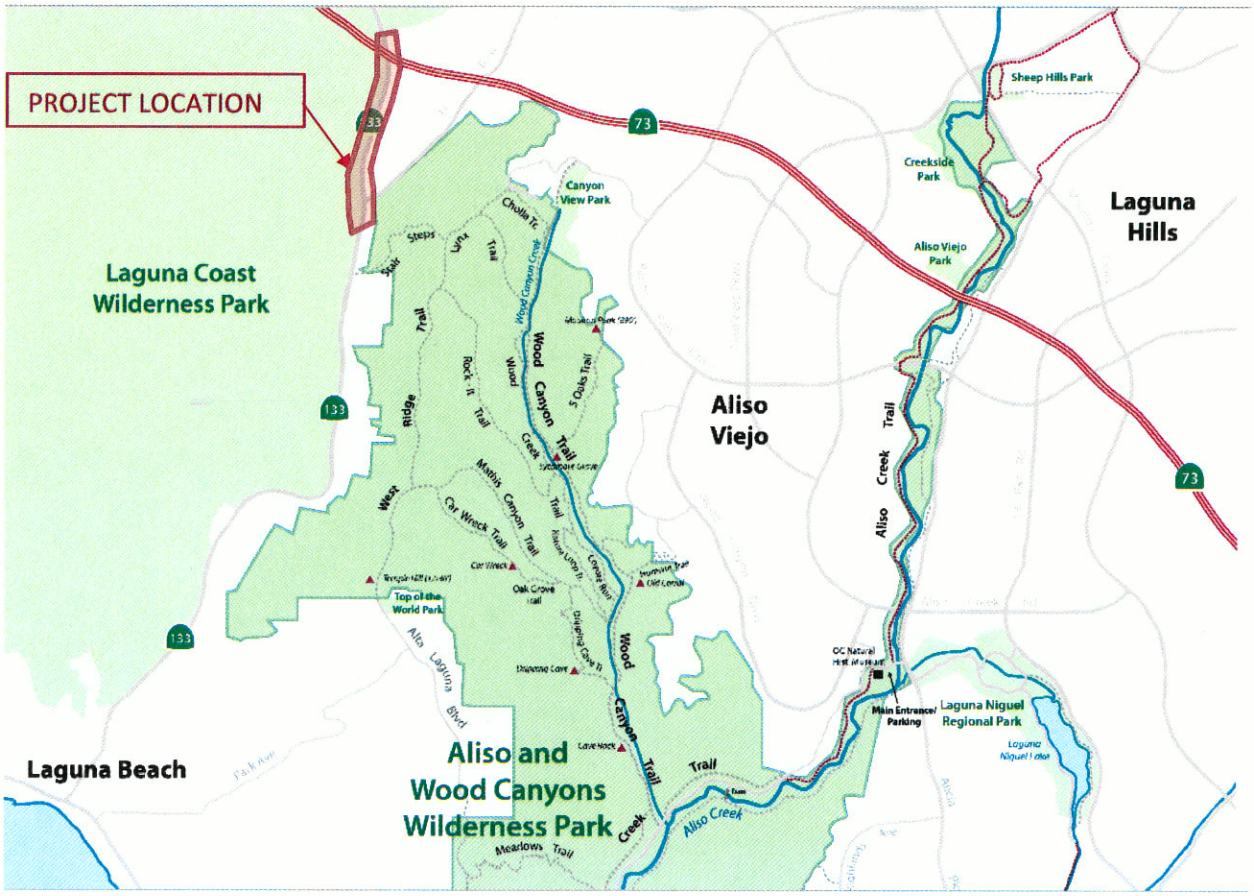
The proposed retaining wall will be treated with aesthetics features that would blend into the natural setting of the area. This would involve colors and textures that replicate or preserve the existing rock outcroppings. The retaining wall would be designed to preserve a mature oak tree that is located near the retaining wall. Power poles will be underground for the widening to improve safety while increase clear visibilities.

Proposed location of the retaining wall, view south from El Toro Road.

Mature oak tree above the proposed retaining wall.

PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

The project location and setting provides for the context for determining the type of changes to the existing visual environment. This project is on Route 133 (Rte-133), from 0.3 miles south of Route 133 (Laguna Canyon Road)/El Toro Road intersection (PM 3.1), to 0.2 miles north of SR-73/133 interchange (PM 4.3), in the City of Laguna Beach, in South Orange County. The project is located in the urban boundary of Orange County, much of the land surrounding the region is designated as Laguna Coast Wilderness Park to the west, and Aliso/Wood Canyons Regional Park to the east and southeast. This section of Laguna Canyon Road winds through the canyon with mounding hills and natural vegetation consisting of grasslands, native vegetation (coastal sage scrub plants), and rock outcroppings. The landscape is characterized by rocky bluff towers above canyon trails. Trails lead through oak and sycamore woodlands and up into ridges with expansive vistas. Coastal Sage Scrub community covers hilltops and slopes, along with patches of native valley grasslands and maritime Chaparral. Large rock formations and mature native oak trees are visible in the foreground and rolling hills are present as in the background. The land use within the corridor or project corridor is primarily a conventional highway through a flat rural/residential section of the corridor, coming from the south, downtown Laguna Beach, and rolling canyon north of El Toro Road. Anneliese's school is located just south of El Toro Road on the NB side of Laguna Canyon Road within a rural setting across the street from the proposed retaining wall. Views to and from the project corridor consisting of open spaces hills and ridgelines associated with Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and Aliso/Wood Canyons Regional Park. The project corridor is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the highway right-of-way, and is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance.



Surrounding Wilderness Parks

View looking south on Route 133 (Laguna Canyon Rd) towards the City of Laguna Beach

View looking north on Route 133 before the El Toro intersection.

View looking north on Route 133 / El Toro Road (Laguna Canyon Rd/El Toro) intersection.

Route 133 is a sensitive corridor regarding visual resources within the County of Orange and City of Laguna Beach. It is not an eligible or designated State Scenic Highway, however, the City of Laguna Beach General Plan has locally designated it a rural scenic highway, and the County of Orange has designated it as a view corridor.

VISUAL RESOURCES AND RESOURCE CHANGE

Visual resources of the project setting are defined and identified below by assessing *visual character* and *visual quality* in the project corridor. *Resource change* is assessed by evaluating the visual character and the visual quality of the visual resources that comprise the project corridor before and after the construction of the proposed project.

The visual character of the proposed project will be compatible with the existing visual character of the corridor. The proposed road widening would appear similar to existing facilities, and the utility relocate to underground would improve visibilities. The proposed retaining wall with aesthetic treatments will blend with existing forms, lines, colors, and textures in the area. There would be no change to the visual character of the canyon beyond the proposed improvements. These pattern elements would remain similar year-around with little seasonal change to the mostly the evergreen vegetation. Changes to the visual character as a result of the proposed project would be low.

The visual quality of the existing corridor will not be altered by the proposed project. The roadway viewshed from the bottom of the canyon encompasses the roadway views to the tops of the hills on both sides of the canyon. Factors that can contribute to visual quality, vividness and unity, or memorability of visual impressions and harmonious visual patterns of landscape of the canyon will remain unchanged. Various textural elements including natural topography, native vegetation, rock outcroppings opens spaces of the canyon will remain visible and create a sense of unity for surrounding viewers. Intactness or order of natural and man-built landscape will slightly change with the addition of the retaining wall. Aesthetic treatment to the retaining wall could reduce visual impacts to resource change in the corridor. The proposed project would result in low changes to the visual character, and visual quality would be changed slightly or not at all, the overall Resource Change would be low.

VIEWERS AND VIEWER RESPONSE

Neighbors (people with views *to* the road) and *highway users* (people with views *from* the road) will not be affected by the proposed project. The public views to the project site include motorist utilizing Laguna Canyon Road (Route 133) and/or El Toro Road, and community residents are utilizing Anneliese's schools, or visitors/ hikers within the two adjacent wilderness parks.

Motorist (highway users) views of the project corridor consist of the canyon, ridgelines, natural vegetation and rock outcroppings associated with Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and Aliso/Wood Canyons Regional Park. Community residents (neighbors) views to the road include motorist utilizing Laguna Canyon Road (Route 133) and/or El Toro Road. Community resident's views would be from Anneliese's schools, or visitors to the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and/or Aliso Wood Canyons Regional Park to the project site.

Viewer response measures the change in viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity.

Viewer exposure is the degree to which viewers are exposed to a view by physical location, number of community viewers, and duration of views. Motorist (travelers) are viewing from a distance and views of the location may be many, but for a brief duration, compared to community viewers being few for longer duration and with closer views. The average viewer exposure of the project site would be moderate-low for both motorist and community viewer groups.

Viewer sensitivity is a measure of how receptive a viewer is of a particular item or scene. Sensitive viewers in the project area include motorist traveling along SR-133 and El Toro Road, and neighbors using Anneliese's schools or the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. As such, viewer sensitivity in the project vicinity is considered moderate-high.

It is anticipated that the average viewer response of all viewer groups will be moderate.

Viewer Response

Viewer Group	Viewer Sensitivity	Viewer Exposure	Viewer Response
Motorists	Moderate-High	Moderate-Low	Moderate
Community Residents	Moderate-High	Moderate-Low	Moderate

VISUAL IMPACT

Visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes. The implementation of the proposed project would result in widening of the road at the intersection of SR-133 and El Toro Road to extend additional lanes, and eliminate non-standard land drops for improved highway operations. This requires relocation of utility poles and addition of a retaining wall on the SB side, south of the intersection.
Implementation of the project would expose motorist to short-term construction activities. Construction staging will occur and provide for temporary K-rails within the project site to complete work beyond. The proposed construction would expose surfaces, construction debris, equipment, and truck traffic to motorist and neighbors. These impacts are short-term and would cease upon completion of construction. The no-build alternative would not have visual impacts. Proposed project features would be similar to the existing developed features in the project corridor. Further implementation of recommended minimization measures would affect changes to Visual Resources and Viewer Responses resulting in moderate-low visual impacts for the project.

CEQA Environmental Checklist:

I. AESTHETICS: Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista

No. After vegetation is removed for widening, the existing vegetation, tree groupings, and rock outcroppings beyond the removal will still provide a scenic background that should not affect visual character. Addition of retaining wall aesthetics and preservation of the mature oak tree on the southbound side, should maintain the visual character of the area.

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to tree, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway

No. This route is not eligible or designated as a state scenic highway.

c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surrounds?

The visual character will remain similar to conditions before construction improvements. To minimize potential visual impacts, the retaining wall will receive aesthetic treatments to blend in with the surrounding area. The retaining wall will be designed to preserve a mature oak tree, and with aesthetic treatments

on the retaining wall, any visual impacts should be slight. The overall change to visual character or quality remains low.

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

No light or glare will be produced by the project.

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES

Avoidance or minimization measures have been identified and can lessen visual impacts caused by the project. Also, the inclusion of aesthetic features in the project design previously discussed can help generate public acceptance of a project. This section describes additional avoidance and/or minimization measures to address specific visual impacts. These will be designed and implemented with concurrence of the District Landscape Architect.

The following measures to avoid or minimize visual impacts will be incorporated into the project:

- **Minimization Measure 1**, Alternative 2: To maintain the visual character and quality of the project area, the proposed project should include aesthetic treatment for retaining wall, located on the southbound side of route 133, south of the intersection. Aesthetic treatments shall be determined in consultation with the District Landscape Architect during the final design process.

CONCLUSIONS

Implementation of the proposed project would result in moderate-low visual impact as the proposed project would retain the natural visual character of the area. With implementation of the recommended minimization measures, visual impacts in this regard will be further reduced.